

Lights ... Camera ... Alex
By Saria Canady

Daymion Alexander Snelling — that’s “Alex” to you — is a man of many layers.

On the outside, the former NCCU Greater Atlanta Alumni chapter president is reserved, no-nonsense and private.

He works as an accountant for a large, Atlanta-based media conglomerate. His strait-laced exterior and Corporate America seriousness, at first glance, seem to carry over into other aspects of his life.

For those fortunate enough to penetrate his outer shell, though, he is talkative, fun-loving and enthusiastic with quite the sense of humor. Many are surprised to find out he has an affinity for show. When he’s not putting in time as an accountant, he’s working on his budding acting career.

“I’ve always been a silly kid. I’ve always been entertaining people,” he says, adding that is probably why he earned the nickname “Big Time” from his great Aunt Bettie. “Even when I was in elementary school, I had to be taken out of regular class because I couldn’t sit still. I wanted people to look at me.

“Seriously, I had to be put in a special class where I could get more attention from a teacher because I was so bouncy.”

Boyhood bouncing aside, Snelling, 33, is focused and determined.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, he is standing at the kitchen counter of his East Atlanta home, quietly struggling to get freshly cut fruit salad to fit into a food storage container. After a few shakes, some melon rearranging and several fruitless attempts to snap the lid, he seems to anticipate the brewing question.

“I’m the type of person who’s going to try something until I get it right,” he says.

He is quick to point out, though, that he didn’t always have such resolve.

In 1995, after what he remembers as a less-than-stellar high school career, the Raleigh, N.C., native enrolled in Durham Technical Community College, just up the road from NCCU.

“I knew I wasn’t ready for a four-year university,” Snelling says. “I really didn’t prepare myself in high school for college.”

He had no clue what he wanted to do with his life, he says, but his grandmother, with whom he lived at the time, wasn’t going to let him sit around and do nothing.

“During that time, I just kind of played around, hung out with friends” and didn’t take college too seriously, Snelling says.

When he finished up at Durham Tech in 1998, he transferred to the NCCU School of Business. He chose to study accounting, but not because he was particularly passionate about it. He went at the persuasion of family members, a few of whom he had seen make a comfortable living as accountants.

Soon, though, “classes were kicking my butt, left and right,” Snelling says, and distractions were aplenty. So in 2000, he withdrew from school, packed his car and moved to Dallas on a whim. There, he crashed with a friends, partied and bounced from one temp job to the next.

“I lived the life,” he recalls, with a boyish excitement dipped in the wisdom of hindsight. It was a life that began to get the best of him after about a year. His love for Dallas waned. So he drove the 18-hours back to North Carolina and re-enrolled in the accounting program at NCCU. But before long he heard that homesick voice of his colorful Dallas life calling his name — and he answered.

“I didn’t even officially withdraw,” Snelling says. “I just quit. I got all Fs, which brought my GPA even further down.

“My parents were like, ‘This guy has gone completely nuts,’ ” says Snelling, an only child. “ ‘He’s never gonna graduate. He’s just making a mess of his life.’ ”

His second stint in Dallas wasn’t much different from the first — staying with friends, partying, job-hopping and living far beyond his means.

“I would walk up in Saks!” he laughs. “I don’t even shop at Saks now. But back then, 10 years ago, I was shopping at Saks. No degree, didn’t own a thing, just trying to be something I wasn’t.

“Just swiping, swiping, swiping. Had about 12 cards. If one didn’t go through, I’d pull out another one. That’s the type of craziness I was doing back then.”

But the department store where he so often splurged on \$120 shirts became the first setting of his two-fold intervention. The store clerk, he says, cut up his Saks card on the spot to halt his irresponsible spending. Part two? He was dismissed from his job, but not before his boss gave him the nudge to get his act together.

“ ‘You know, you are a very intelligent man. What do you plan on doing with your life?’ ” Snelling recounts his former employer’s question, for which he had no answer. “She said, ‘Sweetheart, you need to go back and finish school.’ ”

That he did. Snelling graduated with a bachelor's in business administration from NCCU in December 2003, making his parents proud to know their lost son had finally found his senses. He landed his first job in Atlanta the following January. He has been working steadily ever since and even earned his Master of Business Administration from Keller Graduate School of Management last year. Soon after, though, he decided to get serious about his real passion.

He auditioned and was accepted into the Horizon Theatre Company's nine-week apprenticeship program, during which he learned the ins and outs of theater.

Now, his taking acting classes, frequenting casting, and studying the craft. He has already appeared in two live stage performances at the Horizon Theatre and landed supernumerary roles in two recent Tyler Perry films. He is currently prepping for a lead role in a stage play about a disco icon.

He is determined to make good on that deferred dream he etched in a notebook when he was 13. And in five years, he hopes to be a full-time actor, turning his Aunt Bettie-given name into a prophecy.

Big time.